

BACKGROUND BRIEFING

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE SPOKESMAN

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The Pentagon

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11:10 A.M.

October 28, 1962

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QUESTION: Are we on the record or background?

ANSWER: I think we better make it background.

QUESTION: Spokesman?

ANSWER: Yes, I think it probably would be better to do that because I haven't got anything. I thought if I came down here I might be helpful for anything you have in mind. We don't have anything to announce.

QUESTION: Can you tell us anything at all about any Soviet ships or any Communist bloc ships still proceeding to Cuba?

ANSWER: No, I can't tell you that. The overall picture seems to be that a good many of them have gone the other way.

QUESTION: A good many?

QUESTION: Is work still proceeding?

QUESTION: Excuse me just a second. Would you say almost all?

ANSWER: I would say that the flow has been markedly different. Apparently there are some that are going west, but apparently others have disappeared from the scene entirely.

QUESTION: Is work still proceeding on the missile sites?

ANSWER: As of the last surveillance it has been.

QUESTION: When was that last surveillance?

ANSWER: Let us be sure that you don't get yourself caught on some hard hook. The last intelligence I had, the last surveillance material, indicated, as we have said, that the bases are going ahead. Now, what has happened since Mr. Khrushchev made his announcement that he has directed his military officers to: One, dismantle the missiles and crate them and get them out. I am not prepared to answer. I expect we will have answers, but I can't give it to you now, I don't know.

QUESTION: You mean you don't have any reports of aerial surveillance since Khrushchev made his announcements?

ANSWER: That is right.

QUESTION: Is aerial surveillance continuing?

ANSWER: As far as I know the aerial surveillance is continuing. Wait a second. Dick Fryklund asked me when did I expect to get the next word, and I said I would not set any time limit on it.

QUESTION: When did you get the last word that work was still proceeding on the missile sites?

ANSWER: The statement was issued last night.

QUESTION: Was it updated since daylight this morning?

ANSWER: That was the last word we had. The last word I had.

QUESTION: Nighttime surveillance?

ANSWER: I didn't indicate what it was.

QUESTION: Do you have any indication that our planes are now being accompanied by fighter planes or our reconnaissance planes are armed?

ANSWER: I wouldn't know at this time. I wouldn't be able to make any comment on that.

QUESTION: Are they escorted by those troop carriers?

ANSWER: That would be surprising, wouldn't it?

QUESTION: I would like to clear it up, would it be proper to say, as of last night, work was continuing?

ANSWER: As of the last official statement which we issued yesterday, which stated that work was continuing, that would be the time that I am speaking of. I would not make any deduction one way or the other of what is happening down there since. But the surveillance is continuing.

MORE

ANSWER: The possibility of further attack on our aircraft and the continued build-up of the offensive weapons system in Cuba requires that we be prepared for any eventuality.

QUESTION: Have our commanders been given orders to take whatever action is necessary to protect their forces including those planes?

ANSWER: I can't address myself to what orders were given, but the statement we made yesterday says that action will be taken to protect them, and surveillance will continue, if you recall.

QUESTION: Has there been any relaxation of our military preparations this morning for any contingency?

ANSWER: None that I know of.

QUESTION: Do our people have the same orders as in South Vietnam, to fire if fired upon?

ANSWER: I don't know. I would only say, not linking one to the other, but again refer to the statement of yesterday that our planes will continue the surveillance, and they will be protected. They will be protected as necessary.

QUESTION: Do we have any further information as to the pilot, as to how he was shot down?

Or where the plane landed?

ANSWER. I have not. We said he is presumably lost. Last night, if you will recall, we announced his name, and his wife has been notified that he was presumably lost.

QUESTION: We don't know whether he is shot down or not?

ANSWER: I am not prepared to say.

QUESTION: What type of aircraft was he flying?

ANSWER: I am not prepared to say.

QUESTION: High or low?

ANSWER: I am not prepared to say.

QUESTION: Can you tell us under what circumstances the United States might, or what the orders are, to either relax or call off the blockade? Relax it a little bit? After what point?

ANSWER: There have been no orders.

QUESTION: I realize that. Under what circumstances might there be?

ANSWER: None have been raised. The objective at the present, as the President stated in his proclamation, was the elimination of those bases.

QUESTION: Does it start when they begin to dismantle?

ANSWER: I would make no conjecture of any sort on that basis.

QUESTION: What about Khrushchev's charge of the spy plane?

ANSWER: It sounds like one of Mr. Khrushchev's charges to me.

QUESTION: Have there been any other notifications to next of kin?

ANSWER: No. The only one that has been involved is Major Anderson.

QUESTION: Actually those seven or five, I guess it was, that died in the plane crash are considered part of this thing, are they not?

ANSWER: I didn't mean to exclude them. I thought Dan's question really meant to the imposition of the quarantine and the real positive action begun since then. That is what I was referring to.

QUESTION: Can you tell us any more about the nature of the buildup that began last night?

ANSWER: You have the list of the Air Force troop carriers, that is the extent of what we have announced.

QUESTION: You put one state on there and you didn't call anyone from that state?

ANSWER: I did mention that. Apparently, it was my error in reading from the list. This is completely an error on my part. I must have been cross-eyed last night and read Tennessee for Texas. There is no significance of the fact other than it was an error of my own reading from a sheet of paper. In other words, Texas was not on or off. It was not on the list. I misread a couple of times when I said Texas. Texas is so much in my mind all the time.

QUESTION: Do you expect that McNamara will see us today?

ANSWER: I had thought so until late last night. It is still a possibility. But I am not sure now.

QUESTION: At what time, if it does happen?

ANSWER: I would hope -- in fact, the way he is scheduled, it would probably have to be sometime in the middle part of the day. If it doesn't happen, don't be surprised. The White House announced yesterday they met three times over there yesterday. I don't know what they are meeting on today.

QUESTION: The pool was tentatively arranged yesterday and called off?

ANSWER: It has been postponed temporarily.

QUESTION: When can we expect further word on pools?

ANSWER: Just as soon as I can give it to you. It will be later.

QUESTION: Did you say that McNamara was at the White House two times yesterday?

ANSWER: I think the White House said there was a meeting of the Executive Council. I am not speaking for the Council, but I thought I saw on the wire an announcement.

QUESTION: Was McNamara at the White House three times yesterday?

Any number of times?

ANSWER: They were all pretty much constantly all during the day. I think the announcement was, that I read today, there were three meetings.

QUESTION: Has he been home to sleep since last Sunday?

ANSWER: No, he has not been home to sleep since last Sunday but he has been home twice for dinner.

QUESTION: Is he here this morning?

QUESTION: When are we going to get the reports on the other interceptions down in the blockaded area?

ANSWER: We have given the two reports of intercepts. Those are the two that I know about.

QUESTION: Can you tell us about the Swedish freighter that ignored the signals and just kept going?

ANSWER: Do you think a Swedish ship would do that?

QUESTION: Has the order gone into effect under which some ships, presumably NATO ships, are cleared in advance and have certification and go through without being stopped?

ANSWER: I don't think any order has been given. I go back to what I said in the past. There are 2,000 ships out there. Lots of those ships we are not interested in. They are going to some other port.

QUESTION: There was some talk of certification, that is the reason I asked.

ANSWER: There has not been any of that that I know of.

QUESTION: Are you prepared to say when the surveillance of Cuba will be discontinued?

ANSWER: No, I am not. The surveillance continues, and it will continue as long as the President wants it continued. I can't speak for him. There is no order today, at this time, in which there is any relaxation whatsoever of the surveillance. I haven't any idea how long it will continue, but it does continue.

QUESTION: Why wouldn't trucks be considered part of the mechanical equipment to support the missile sites? They use trucks to build the bases, don't they?

ANSWER: Sorry, I won't quarrel with you. I am not an authority on why it would or wouldn't. I don't know what sort of trucks they were.

QUESTION: Have any orders gone out to any reserve units in the United States of any service to increase their drill periods?

ANSWER: Not that I know of. I think not.

QUESTION: Nothing to increase their readiness in terms of drill?

ANSWER: Not that I know of.

QUESTION: In reference to Khrushchev's charge about the spy plane, are you denying that incident?

ANSWER: I am making no comments whatsoever on anything that Mr. Khrushchev says.

QUESTION: There is an impression from what took place last night, and other events, that we were not many hours or days away from military action on Cuba?

ANSWER: I don't want to comment on any impressions, but I think on the basis, without any reference -- what was the word you used, "invasion"?

QUESTION: No, "military action."

ANSWER: I think we have had military action. Certainly the action of the quarantine is an implementation. I think the things that many of you know about -- Most all of you, all media have reacted magnificently in response to the request. There has been quite a development of power for the purpose of defense of the United States, and for the purpose of implementing the President's decision that those bases are coming down. But I wouldn't say out of that that I would deduce what, if any, further military action there might be. On the contrary, the way this is developing, speculation on your part, or anything that I lend to speculation, could be nothing except very dangerous and harmful to our country. I would urge you not to speculate wildly, or even shrewdly, on anything that may be taking place, or may not be taking place.

More

QUESTION: You said the other day that invasion was, of course, one of our contingency plans. As of this morning, is invasion still one of our contingencies?

ANSWER: I would answer that by saying as of six months ago, a year ago, or eight months from now, in every hot situation that develops, the Chiefs have contingency plans for everything that they, as military experts, can think of.

QUESTION: Could we put on the record: "I would urge you not to speculate wildly or shrewdly?"

ANSWER: Yes. Can you read it back? That much you can attribute to me on the record.

(Portion of record read back by reporter.)

MR. SPLITT: The ground rules on the overall meeting are attribution to a Defense Department spokesman. We are trying a statement for the record that you can attribute directly.

ANSWER: Making clear there is no relation between the two.

To clean up one sentence there, let us make this read that "anything that lends".

It makes it a little better sentence in English. If you want to attribute to me the statement on the sort of support for security that the media have lent to us, that is attributable to me. I have said it here and that is quotable.

QUESTION: All media have acted magnificently?

ANSWER: Yes. I know what you are going to come to, Jerry, I have come to this point

QUESTION: No, it is a little more definitive than that. The point is that the President of the United States has written a letter to Khrushchev in which he says he will invade if -- Well now, the President has used the term "invasion". How in the name of God can we write anything out of here and just totally ignore the fact that the President has implied imminent invasion? That is the point I am making.

ANSWER: As to what you write about what the President says or not, I am not going to get into that. Probably we should leave in "anything that I lend to this" in this statement. I was trying to say two things: One, that any speculation, as I have said, is dangerous. And, two, that anything that I lend or say that would add to that speculation is equally so. Now what the President said, and whatever flows out of that, I have no comment on whatsoever.

QUESTION: May I ask one further question?

ANSWER: The dangerous speculation goes across the board.

QUESTION: The point being there are some others of us here, I am sure, who are writing a sort of overall picture, combining anything the President may say about military action with whatever we get out of here. We get into this mish-mash that the White House got into last night of cross notes, and it is very difficult to be writing about invasion out of the White House and switch to a paragraph out of the Pentagon without getting a clue as to violating what you are talking about.

ANSWER: I think if you asked Pierre if he would say the same thing that I said about dangerous speculation, you would find a complete sustaining of it, the same thing out of him, or the same thing out of Bob McNamara. I am not attempting to read the mind of the questioner, but the way the question came gave me the impression of a sense of imminence. But, aside from that, speculation on moves or what not at this time still stays in the status that I tried to indicate. I think you will find it the same all around the government.

MORE

QUESTION: Could you add to this statement you made, that there would be no relaxation of military preparations, I will tell you why. The people out over the country, from what they have heard on the air today, with no newspapers being printed until tomorrow morning, most of the people think it is all over and everything is peaceful and wonderful and fine.

ANSWER: I don't think I said there will be none, because I am not the proper person to say it. What I did say was, that so far as the Defense Department is concerned, I know of no relaxation of the activities that we are carrying on.

QUESTION: Can that be quoted? Can that be put on the record?

ANSWER: So far as I know in the Defense Department there is, as of 11:30, no relaxation of the activities that we have been carrying on.

QUESTION: Would it be possible for you to indicate the time lag between the surveillance you spoke of and our notification of it? For instance, last night you said the missile site construction was continuing as of the last surveillance. Could you indicate the relative times involved?

ANSWER: No, I can't, because there is no fixed pattern. The second reason, our 12 guidances prevent me from discussing anything involving intelligence collection, anything about it, or what it is, until a decision has been made beyond me to release it. So in this period I cannot discuss intelligence.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

QUESTION: Could you be general about that? For instance, if something was announced last night, would it be in the same day or could it be possibly several days before? Do you see what I mean?

ANSWER: I think if you look back on the record, Ray, yesterday I had said that surveillance work was going on and I know it as a fact as of that time.